

AMENDMENT TO THE SPECIFICATION

Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 6, line 23 and ending on page 7, line 28 with the following replacement paragraph:

The stack 4 of flat items stands on a conveying belt 5, as conveying means, and is supported, on the rear side, on an abutment surface (not illustrated) which can be displaced with the conveying belt 5 in the direction of the separating apparatus. The stack 4 is aligned on a stop surface 6 which is located laterally on the conveying belt 5. The sensor 7 on the suction head 2 constantly measures the negative pressure prevailing in the suction head 2. The negative pressure is realized by an externally arranged negative-pressure source 8 (suction pump). The items lean loosely against the withdrawal unit on the withdrawal side and/or are located such that they lean back in the direction of the abutment surface. The withdrawal operation is started, and the negative-pressure source 8 produces a negative pressure. If an item butts in a planar manner against the withdrawal unit, a specific negative pressure for the range of goods will be established. If the item of mail, rather than abutting in a planar manner, is located in one of the two abovementioned manners in relation to the withdrawal unit, a low negative pressure will form, i.e. the absolute pressure increases since, in dependence on the size of the gap, secondary air is drawn in. The negative pressure prevailing is thus a direct expression of the position of the items in relation to the withdrawal unit. The sensor 7 registers the negative-pressure conditions and signals to the control device 10 when the negative pressure in the suction head 2 is too low, i.e. when the absolute pressure measured exceeds the nominal value. The drive control device then starts the conveying belt 5. The conveying belt 5 moves the stack 4 in the direction of the withdrawal belt 1. The next item is transported into the suction-attachment region, where it is gripped by the suction air and attached to the withdrawal belt 1 by suction. Since the item is then located parallel to the suction-head opening, the negative pressure increases, i.e. the absolute pressure measured decreases; the measured value of the sensor 7 reaches a settable desired value, and the conveying belt 5 is thus switched off by the drive control device and the item is withdrawn.